
*Confronting the Foreigner: Common Policies of
Rashid al-Din and Liu Bingzhong on Mongol Rule
in Iran and China*



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Abstract

This article discusses the career of three historical figures who had a position of authority in the courts of the Ilkhans and the Great Khans of the Mongol Empire in China: Rashid al-Din Tabib (d. 1318), the Persian statesman and historian; Liu Bingzhong (d. 1274), Qubilai Khan's (r. 1260-94) Chinese counsellor; and Bolad Aqa (d. 1313), the famed Mongol tribesman. This study raises the question of whether Rashid al-Din's policies, when he was in office as the vizier of Ghazan Khan (r. 1295-1304), were modelled in some respects on the approach of the Chinese nobles—Liu in particular—to the Mongols during the early stages of the Mongol rule over China. In addition, taking into account Bolad's noticeable presence in the courts of the Mongols in Ilkhanid Iran and Yuan China, it seeks to shed light on his role as an intermediary and a possible conduit for Chinese political thoughts to reach Rashid al-Din.

Keywords: Sino-Persian contacts; Ilkhanids; Yuan dynasty; Rashid al-Din; Bolad Aqa; Liu Bingzhong

“Even though an empire may be conquered on horse-back, it could not be administered on horse-back.”

—Liu Bingzhong, in his memorandum to Qubilai Khan¹

Möngke Khan (r. 1251-59), Genghis Khan's grandson and the fourth Khaqan of the Mongol Empire died in 1259. Following his death, competition for the title of Great Khan intensified between Mongol princes, and the empire gradually fragmented into four autonomous khanates including the Golden Horde, the Chaghadaid Khanate, the Ilkhanate

¹H. Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung (1216-1274)', in *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period (1200-1300)*, (eds.) I. D. Rachewiltz, H. Chan, H. Ch'i-sh'ing and P. Geier (Wiesbaden, 1993), pp. 245-269.

and the Yuan dynasty, defined respectively as the north-western, central, south-western and eastern sector of the Mongol Empire. In addition to the khanates, Qaidu (d. 1301) the grandson of Ögedei (r. 1229–41), established a state in Central Asia in the 1270s which was independent of the Khaqan's authority. The state survived him under the rule of the Chaghadaids.² Hülegü Khan (r. 1256–65), the founder of the Ilkhanate of Iran, and his brother Qubilai Khan (r. 1260–94), the first emperor of the Yuan dynasty in China, became allies against their rivals in other sectors of the empire. While the centuries-old political, cultural and commercial contact between Iran and China preceded the foundation of the Mongol Empire, the Ilkhanids and the Yuan became involved in a deeper and more intimate intercultural communication. In almost one century of the Ilkhanid domination of Iran (from the beginning of Hülegü's military campaign in 1255 to the death of the ninth Ilkhan, Abu Sa'id in 1335), the Mongolian courts in the two states interacted in a wide variety of areas including historiography, cartography, astronomy, printing, cuisine, languages and different kinds of art and crafts.³ The extensive interaction caused widespread circulation of ideas, themes, motifs and techniques throughout the Mongols' territory.

In the context of Sino-Persian contacts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, much has been written on the transfer of Chinese arts and crafts to West Asia. This article, however, places emphasis upon Chinese political notions that reached Iran. Our attention is devoted to the political agents who had a position of authority in the courts of the Ilkhans and the Great Khans of the Mongol Empire in China with a particular focus on three historical figures: Rashid al-Din Tabib (d. 1318), the Persian statesman and historian, Liu Bingzhong (d. 1274), Qubilai Khan's Chinese counsellor, and Bolad Aqa (d. 1313), the famed Mongol tribesman.

It is beyond the scope of this article to present a full analysis of the workings of government in Mongol Iran and China. Rather, what will be offered is a fleeting overview of the institutional reforms initiated by native intellectuals in Mongol administration. Through the comparison of their actions, we raise the question of whether Rashid al-Din's policies towards the Mongols were modelled in some respects on the approach of the Chinese nobles—Liu in particular—to the conquerors during the early stages of their rule over China. If so, what are the indications of such phenomenon? In addition, taking into account Bolad's noticeable appearance in the courts of the Mongols in Iran and China, we seek to shed light on his role as an intermediary and a possible conduit for Chinese political thoughts to reach Rashid al-Din.⁴

The purpose of drawing an analogy between the policies pursued by the Chinese elite and Rashid al-Din is not to acknowledge the former as a source of influence or inspiration for

²M. Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia* (Richmond, 1997), pp. 1–3.

³T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 9.

⁴The native elite's responses to the domination of foreign powers in the pre-modern world is an issue of great interest. Morgan, for example, has drawn an analogy between Rashid al-Din and Cassiodorus Senator in late fifth-century Italy with relation to the viziers' responses to Barbarian rule in the two states. Delving into their writings, he has pointed out a certain degree of continuity that existed between the basic administration of the invaders and that of their predecessors in post-conquest Iran and Ostrogothic Italy. See D. Morgan, 'Cassiodorus and Rashid al-Din on Barbarian Rule in Italy and Persia', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40, 2 (1977), pp. 302–320.

the latter. The comparison attempts to point towards Rashid al-Din's possible awareness of the institutional and intellectual framework that had been founded on Chinese traditions, and his eagerness to imitate the same scheme that had proved to be fruitful in China. The Khaqans of the Mongol Empire and their relatives in Iran, who had come from the same ethnic and cultural background, although ended up in different socio-political circumstances, faced similar problems. They are likely to show similar behaviour in their encounter with the sedentary world. Therefore, it is not implausible that their civilised hosts followed similar instructions to cope with the state of anarchy and confusion followed by Mongol invasions.

Our three personages have not been treated equally in scholarly literature. Rashid al-Din has enjoyed a prominent presence in the literature on the dynastic history of the Mongols in Iran.⁵ On the contrary, Liu, despite his lengthy productive career in the service of Qubilai Khan, appears in only a handful of studies, which are built upon even fewer Chinese primary sources. The brief description of Liu's career in this article is largely based on the works of Hok-Lam Chan who believes that the primary sources on him are not impressive.⁶ Liu also receives passing references in a number of studies that cite primarily Chan.

Liu's limited appearance in Chinese sources alone does not prove that he never reached high status in post-conquest China. Conversely, scanty yet important historical texts attest to his influential role in the formative years of the Mongol rule in the Far East. Liu achieved the position of imperial advisor when Qubilai was enthroned in 1260, but the Khaqan had benefitted from his wisdom and advice for several years prior to then. The fact that Liu served Qubilai, for the most part, before his enthronement and died only three years after the official proclamation of the Yuan dynasty partly explains his unimpressive presence in the official histories of the dynasty. Furthermore, as will be discussed later in the article, the season of Chinese influence at the Mongol court was brief. Although Liu paved the way for the participation of Chinese advisors and administrators in the early years of the Mongol government, many of whom were forced to leave their offices when the Central Asians gradually took over as financiers and administrators.⁷ The lack of more diverse primary sources as well as scholarly works should not be regarded as a serious obstacle to scrutinising Liu's career as he deserves to be brought to the attention of scholars who examine Sino-Persian varied and extensive political and cultural relationships.

Bolad, owing to his political activities in China and later in Iran, has been documented in both Persian and Chinese historical texts and thus has achieved a certain renown in modern

⁵For further discussion on the life and works of Rashid al-Din, see, for example, S. Kamola, *Making Mongol History: Rashid al-Din and the Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* (Edinburgh, 2019); D. Morgan, 'Rashid al-Din Ṭabīb', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (eds.) P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (2012), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6237 (accessed 10 January 2020); S. Blair, 'Patterns of Patronage and Production in the Ilkhanid Iran: The Case of Rashid al-Din', in *The Court of the Il-khans, 1290-1340*, (eds.) J. Raby and T. Fitzherbert (Oxford, 1996), pp. 39-62; R. Amitai-Preis, 'New Material from the Mamluk Sources for the Biography of Rashid al-Din', in *The Court of the Il-khans, 1290-1340*, (eds.) J. Raby and T. Fitzherbert (Oxford, 1996), pp. 23-37; B. Hoffmann, 'Speaking about Oneself: Autobiographical Statements in the Works of Rashid al-Din', in *Rashid al-Din: Agent and Mediator of Cultural Exchanges in Ilkhanid Iran*, (eds.) A. Akasoy, C. Burnett and R. Yoeli-Tlalim (London, 2013), pp. 1-14; Rashid al-Din, M. Minuvi and I. Afshar, *Waqf Nāma-yi Rab'i Rashīdī* (Tehran, 1971), pp. 32-37.

⁶H. Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung: A Buddhist-Taoist Statesman at the Court of Khubilai Khan', *T'oung Pao* 53, 1/3 (1967), pp. 98-146.

⁷Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung', p. 265.

scholarship.⁸ To examine Bolad's career in this article, we sift through Persian first-hand accounts of the Ilkhanids but rely mainly on the secondary sources and their interpretations of Chinese original texts.

The Chinese advisory circle around the Mongol Khaqans

The Chinese elite's response to the Mongol rule over China was beyond mere enforced acceptance. They developed a greater tolerance towards the Mongols under the influence of some individuals such as Yelü Chucai (d. 1244) who believed that "the Mongol dynasty possessed the Heavenly Mandate" although the new emperors needed to follow the teachings of the Three Sages, Confucius, Buddha and Lao-tzu, in order to achieve the legitimacy that was essential to ensure good government.⁹

Yelü and Liu Bingzhong are two key individuals who are often regarded as a team by historians due to their similar contributions to the Mongol rule in China.¹⁰ The former served the first two Great Khans of the Mongol Empire, Genghis Khan and Ögedei, and the latter was in the service of their successor, Qubilai Khan.

After the fall of the capital of the Jin dynasty (1115-1234) in 1215, Yelü began to serve the Mongols as a scribe. He was later promoted to the advisor and astrologer of Genghis Khan, and afterwards was appointed as the governor of North China under Ögedei. He sought to draw Ögedei into Confucianism and to reform traditional Mongol practices accordingly.¹¹ Yelü created a blueprint for the Mongol administrative organisation that highlighted empowering civilian authority (rather than military control) as one of its pillars. This policy continued until the reign of Qubilai when a group of Chinese advisors, among whom was our famed Liu, carried out the same reforms in the civil administration.¹²

Liu was a Chinese Chán Buddhist monk¹³ who later became Qubilai's confidant and chief counsellor, accompanying him during his military campaigns. Liu and his teacher the monk Haiyun (d. 1257), as part of a group of Chinese scholars, were invited to Karakorum by Qubilai in 1242, 18 years before his enthronement. Haiyun advised Qubilai to benefit from qualified people in his entourage. A few years later in 1249, during the reign of his elder brother Möngke, Liu submitted a memorandum to Qubilai on government policy and administration. In the document, he underlined the traditional Chinese model of government that gave priority to the civil administration over the military. In addition, he stressed the necessity of adopting Chinese institutions in the administration of Chinese territory in the Mongol Empire. Liu believed that the chaos caused by the Mongols' military campaigns and subsequent disorders would be ended through the restoration of civil

⁸For example, see Thomas Allsen's three publications on Bolad: *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2001); 'Biography of a Cultural Broker: Bolad Ch'eng-Hsiang in China and Iran', in *The Court of the Il-khans, 1290-1340*, (eds.) J. Raby and T. Fitzherbert (Oxford, 1996), pp. 7-22; 'Two Cultural Brokers of Medieval Eurasia: Bolad Aqa and Marco Polo', in *Nomadic Diplomacy, Destruction and Religion from the Pacific to the Adriatic*, (ed.) M. Gervers and W. Schleppe (Toronto, 1994), pp. 63-78.

⁹I. D. Rachewiltz, 'Sino-Mongol Culture Contacts in the XIII Century: A Study on Yeh-lü Ch'u-t's'ai' (unpublished PhD diss., Australian National University, 1960), pp. 55-56.

¹⁰Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung: A Buddhist-Taoist Statesman', p. 100.

¹¹Ch. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongolian Empire* (New York, 2003), p. 600.

¹²Rachewiltz, 'Sino-Mongol Culture Contacts', p. 68.

¹³Chán is a tradition of Mahayana Buddhism.

authority. The implementation of Liu's recommendations meant that Qubilai would replace the Mongol tribal system with Chinese institutions, an effective policy that substantially changed the administration of the Mongol Empire.¹⁴ Along with more general Confucian moral principles, Liu offered a detailed reform programme in his memorandum including establishing an orderly hierarchical bureaucracy, normalising taxation rates, creating a standard code of law, standardising units of measurement, renovating the calendar, restoring ancient rituals and musical instruments, and cultivating fertile lands and breeding military horses.¹⁵

When Qubilai ascended the throne in 1260, Liu was promoted to the position of imperial advisor. He was one of the first to be asked for advice regarding the administrative problems of the empire. Liu in collaboration with Xu Heng (d. 1281), a Confucian scholar, took the opportunity to submit a proposal for the reorganisation of the government on the basis of the Chinese model. Qubilai accepted the scheme and it came into operation. Within the next decade, a comprehensive reformation and sinicisation happened in different sections of the administrative and political system of the empire.¹⁶

It was around this time that Liu recommended the Chinese title 'Yuan' for the Mongol dynasty which did not have a national title until 1271.¹⁷ Afterwards the early rulers of the Mongol Empire were posthumously honoured by Qubilai Khan as 'Yuan emperors' although they had started to use the Chinese title 'emperor' since the time of Genghis Khan. Choosing a Chinese title for the Mongol Empire seems to be part of the process of legitimisation of the Mongol rulers performed by Liu and his Chinese colleagues.

The reforms conducted during the early years of Qubilai's reign, Rachewiltz argues, were the outcome of the process of acculturation or semi-sinicisation that had started under Ögedei. Although making a comparison between the reforms introduced by Yelü and the ones sought later by Qubilai's counsellors, such as Liu, reveals considerable similarities, it seems unlikely that the former provided the inspiration for the latter. Pursuing similar ideas and plans was possibly due to a certain Chinese mindset which acknowledged the superiority of Chinese culture over other cultures, if not as the only form of culture. The Mongol conquerors, from Ögedei to Qubilai, initially seemed to have no choice but adaptation to the culture of their host.¹⁸

Another significant policy pursued by the group of Chinese counsellors from the outset was advising the Mongol Khans to resume the practice of writing the history of the preceding dynasties as it had been a long-standing tradition in China.¹⁹ The proposal to compile the history of the Chin dynasty (1125-1234) was submitted to Qubilai Khan first by Wang E (d. 1273), a former official of the Chin, around 1244, and a few years later in 1249 by Liu. The latter believed in the saying of the sages that "a state may be vanquished, but its history remains"; thus, the dynastic history could inform the future generations of the merits and

¹⁴Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung: A Buddhist-Taoist Statesman', pp. 118-122.

¹⁵Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung', p. 249.

¹⁶Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung: A Buddhist-Taoist Statesman', p. 131.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁸Rachewiltz, 'Sino-Mongol Culture Contacts', pp. 67-68.

¹⁹A. Soudavar, 'The Han-Lin Academy and the Persian Royal Library-Atelier', in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honour of John E. Woods*, (eds.) J. Pfeiffer and S. A. Quinn (Wiesbaden, 2006), pp. 467-484.

deeds of the rulers and ministers. Neither of the recommendations, however, was supported by Qubilai at the time since he was not in a position of authority yet. In 1261, Wang E revised the initial proposal and suggested the composition of the Mongols' dynastic history followed by the histories of the preceding Liao (906–1125) and Chin dynasties. Although Qubilai accepted the proposal and some progress was made in the project under Wang E, the compilation of the histories, for a number of reasons, was postponed until mid-fourteenth century.²⁰

The 'standard histories' of the Liao, Chin and Sung (960–1279) dynasties were eventually compiled under the auspices of the later Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty between 1343 and 1345.²¹ Despite the fact that the history project was completed years after the death of Qubilai Khan, Chan suggests that two Chinese scholars, Wang E and Liu, had laid the foundations of the project some decades earlier when they presented a proposal to Qubilai to compile the historical records of the defunct states.²²

Although the Chinese literati were influential in the formation of the Mongols' policies during the early stages of their rule over China, they were marginalised in the political system by different groups of western immigrants, particularly the Muslims, over the course of time. Therefore, the advisory circle of the Mongols gradually extended to counsellors of other ethnic backgrounds who had migrated from Western and Central Asia to Mongol China.

The conquest of Muslim territories in the last years of Genghis Khan's reign increased noticeably the presence of Muslims in Mongol society. In the following years under Genghis's successors, Muslims were widely used by the Mongol court to rule the conquered lands. Genghis' son, Ögedei resettled large communities of Central Asian Muslims in other territories including China where the Muslims acted as intermediaries, or as Rossabi puts it "convenient buffer", between the Mongols and the Chinese.²³ They were placed by the Mongols in positions that kept them in total disagreement with the Chinese, such as tax collectors and moneylenders. The Muslims' extensive involvement in financial activities increased the Chinese resentment towards them.²⁴ During the short reign of Güyük Khan (r. 1246–8), Ögedei's eldest son, who had Nestorian advisors and ministers, many leading Muslims in government fell into disfavour, although he supported a handful of former governors, such as Mahmud Yalavach (fl. 1218–52), who had been serving the Mongols since the time of Genghis Khan, and his son Mas'ud Beg, and returned them to their former positions.²⁵ Güyük's successor, Möngke Khan sought to regain the Muslims' trust, and, as a goodwill gesture, he exempted them from ordinary taxation and reappointed Mahmud Yalavach as governor of North China.²⁶

²⁰H. Chan, 'Chinese Official Historiography at the Yuan Court: The Composition of the Liao, Chin, and Sung Histories', in *China under Mongol Rule*, (ed.) J. D. Langlois, Jr. (Princeton, 1981), pp. 56–106. For further discussion about the reasons for the postponement, see pp. 64–66.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 56.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 64.

²³While the majority of the intermediaries were Central and West Asian Muslims, other non-Chinese administrators and merchants, such as the famous Venetian Marco Polo, also took part in the formation of the intermediary bureaucracy known as *semu guan* (officials of various categories). See J. N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle, 1997), p. 33.

²⁴M. Rossabi, 'The Muslims in the Early Yüan Dynasty', in *China under Mongol Rule*, (ed.) J. D. Langlois, Jr. (Princeton, 1981), pp. 257–295. See particularly pp. 263–268.

²⁵Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongolian Empire*, p. 340.

²⁶Rossabi, 'The Muslims in the Early Yüan Dynasty', p. 270.

Mahmud and his Mongol administrative methods, inspired by Turco-Islamic traditions, were not popular in North China and provoked discontent among Chinese Confucian-trained literati. The Chinese, however, enjoyed the patronage of Möngke's brother, Qubilai Khan, who had settled in North China rather than Mongolia.²⁷ As it has been discussed so far, in the early stages of his career Qubilai was surrounded by Chinese advisors who were Confucians and Buddhists while few Muslims were present in his entourage. Despite his advocacy of the Chinese, in the years following Qubilai's enthronement, the number of non-Chinese advisors and administrators rose and more Muslims and Uyghurs achieved positions of authority in government. Conversely, the Chinese were visibly discriminated against, for instance, they could no longer hold the position of *dārūghachī* (provincial commander; overseer), and nor were they given private ownership of weapons.²⁸ As a result, several communities of Muslims of different sizes gradually settled or resettled in different regions of China, to the extent that they were found all over the country in Yuan times.²⁹ The Chinese, nonetheless, were not entirely eliminated from the government. While in local administration, the *dārūghachīs* should be Mongol or *semuren* (or *se-mu-jen*), who were non-Chinese groups of various sorts or western immigrants, the administrators had to be chosen from the Han (North Chinese) and Southerners according to Qubilai's decree. In the Central Secretariat, the Hun could hold the position of *pingzhang* (manager) who was in charge of financial affairs.³⁰

Similar circumstances, similar policies?

The hypothesis that Rashid al-Din and Liu shared common policies towards the Mongols is based on the idea that they experienced similar circumstances when they confronted the Mongol conquerors. During the first decades after the conquest of China in the thirteenth century, the Mongol rulers heavily relied on their Chinese advisors to cope with the chaos and to conduct institutional reforms. Chinese literati contributed to varying degrees to the re-organisation of the Mongol government in the newly conquered territories, and to the legitimisation of the foreign rulers who were taking the place of the former emperors of China. To draw the analogy, the political situation in which Rashid al-Din began his career as Ghazan Khan's (r. 1295–1304) vizier is examined. It sheds light on major challenges that he had to overcome to stabilise the Mongol government in Iran.

Ghazan ascended the throne almost four decades after the foundation of the Ilkhanid dynasty by Hülegü Khan in 1256. Prior to his reign, six other Ilkhans had ruled the state and, therefore, it might be expected that they had dealt with the problem of dynastic legitimacy one way or another. Nevertheless, Ghazan's enthronement raised unprecedented issues, which demanded that the Persian elite, who sought to legitimise the rule of the Ilkhans over Iran, adopt innovative policies.

²⁷Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongolian Empire*, p. 340.

²⁸The office of *dārūghachī* (or *ta-lu-hua-ch'ih* which is the Chinese equivalent) was the key institution in Mongol administration of China. For a detailed study of the office of *dārūghachī*, see E. Endicott-West, *Mongolian Rule in China: Local Administration in the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

²⁹Rossabi, 'The Muslims in the Early Yüan Dynasty', pp. 271–273.

³⁰Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongolian Empire*, p. 606.

One year after the death of Qubilai Khan in 1294, Ghazan, who had converted to Islam a few months earlier, was enthroned in Iran. With Ghazan's conversion and his accession to the throne in 1295, Islam became known as the imperial religion in Western Asia.³¹ These changes along with the death of Qubilai Khan and therefore "a considerable relaxing supremacy of the eastern Great Khans", in Jahn's words,³² encouraged the Ilkhan to form his political identity more independent from the Khaqans of the Yuan dynasty. Accordingly, following his conversion, Ghazan ended his ideological connections with the Great Khans in China in order to obtain the support of the Iranians. He officially called himself 'sultan', a propagator and defender of the faith, instead of 'Ilkhan', a subordinate to the Great Khan.³³ This ideological shift, however, seems to be primarily for internal consumption and did not result in a political break between Ilkhanid Iran and Yuan China since the two courts kept their continuous military and diplomatic cooperation until the mid-fourteenth century.³⁴

Given the new circumstances, it is very likely that Rashid al-Din also pursued new strategies to legitimise the newly-converted Ilkhan as the ruler of Iran rather than a Mongol Khan whose reign was formerly validated by the Great Khans of the Mongol Empire. Thus, whether Ghazan had sincere faith in Islam or not, the Islamisation of the Ilkhanid court during his time can be considered as one of the policies encouraged by Rashid al-Din so as to transform the Mongol rulers and fit them into his own ideal mould. He played a major role, as Johnson puts it "in the transformation of Ilkhanid government from a nomadic Central Asian regime into a sedentary Islamic polity".³⁵

In this regard, the situation that Rashid al-Din faced at the beginning of the reign of Ghazan is comparable with the circumstances with which the Chinese literati had to deal at the dawn of the Mongol rule in China. The similar state of affairs partly supports the hypothesis that Rashid al-Din actually had a tendency to look at the strategies pursued by the Chinese advisors in legitimising the Great Khans of the Mongol Empire and facilitating the process of institutional and political transformation of Mongol government. For the same reason, Liu, rather than a contemporary of Rashid al-Din in Yuan China, sounds to be a

³¹ On the Islamisation of the Ilkhans, see R. Amitai-Preiss, 'Sufis and Shamans: Some Remarks on the Islamisation of the Mongols in the Ilkhanate', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42, 1 (1999), pp. 27-46; P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (London, New Haven, 2017), pp. 352-380. On the conversion of Ghazan Khan, see M. Hope, *Power, Politics, and Tradition in the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate of Iran* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 159-181. On the nature of Ghazan Khan's Islamic belief from the perspective of Mamluk sources, see R. Amitai-Preiss, 'Ghazan, Islam and Mongol Tradition: A View from the Mamlūks Sultanate', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59, 1 (1996), pp. 1-10.

³² K. Jahn, 'Kāmalashrī - Rashīd al-Dīn's "Life and Teaching of Buddha": A source for the Buddhism of the Mongol Period', in *Rashid al-Din's History of India*, (ed.) K. Jahn (Berlin, Boston, 1965), pp. xxxi-lxxvii.

³³ The political self-perception of the Ilkhans after conversion was also reflected in the establishment of a new coinage system in which the traditional Islamic coin names dinar and dirham were used. See B. Fragner, 'Ilkhanid Rule and its Contributions to Iranian Political Culture', in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, (ed.) L. Komaroff (Leiden, 2006), pp. 68-80. More importantly, Ghazan Khan omitted the name of the Khaqan from the coins and inscribed his own name alone. "Ruler of the World/Sultan, the Supreme/Ghazan Muhammad/May God Prolong his Reign" is one example of the inscriptions on the coins. For more examples, see T. Allsen, 'Changing Forms of Legitimation in Mongol Iran', in *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery*, (eds.) G. Seaman and D. Marks (Los Angeles, 1991), pp. 223-241. See particularly pp. 230-231.

³⁴ Allsen, 'Biography of a Cultural Broker', p. 11; T. Allsen, 'Notes on Chinese Titles in Mongol Iran', *Mongolian Studies* 14 (1991), pp. 27-39.

³⁵ B. Johnson, 'Rashid al-Din', *Grove Art Online* (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T070807> (accessed 12 September 2020).

proper choice for the purpose of the present research. Liu in fact died long before Rashid al-Din's appointment as the vizier of the Ilkhanid court. Although the two figures did not belong to the same period, Rashid al-Din was directly involved in the political system whose framework had been designed by Liu and his Chinese colleagues.

Rashid al-Din and localising the sources of the Ilkhans' legitimacy

Rashid al-Din entered the service of the Mongol rulers during the reign of the second Ilkhan, Abaqa Khan (r. 1265–82), initially as a physician, but achieved higher positions under Abaqa's successors. Rashid al-Din never gained absolute power throughout his political life, but in the role of the co-vizier of Ghazan Khan and Öljeytü (r. 1304–16), shared the office respectively with Sa'ad al-Din Savaji (d. 1311) and Taj al-Din 'Ali Shah (d. 1324). The long years of service in the Ilkhanid court brought Rashid al-Din great wealth, which enabled him to finance architectural projects in a number of major cities across the Ilkhanid realm.³⁶ The most significant of these was the Rab'-i Rashidi, a grand pious complex in the vicinity of Tabriz which surrounded the mausoleum of the founder. Rashid al-Din personally took care of the extensive endowment of the complex and designated three of his sons as *mutivallī* (custodian), *mushrif* (controller) and *nāzir* (overseer).³⁷

The Rab'-i Rashidi was influential in patronising the production and dissemination of knowledge. Rashid al-Din underwrote the production of a large number of illustrated and non-illustrated books, particularly the manuscripts of the Qur'an and collections of *ḥadīth*.³⁸ Several other illustrated manuscripts commissioned by Ilkhanid patrons—Ghazan Khan, Öljeytü, and Abu Sa'id—were also produced in the Rab'-i Rashidi scriptorium under the auspices of Rashid al-Din and later his son Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad, the most remarkable of which was the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* (*A Compendium of Chronicles*).³⁹

Rashid al-Din also supported the translation of non-Persian manuscripts. A striking example is the *Tansūkh-nāma-yi* (*Tansūqnāma-yi*) *Īlkhānī dar Funūn va 'Ulūm-i Khitā'i* (*Treasure Book of the Ilkhans on the Branches of the Chinese Sciences*). The book is a Persian translation of various Chinese medical texts that contains cosmological and medical images. It was produced by a small team of experts all of whom had been carefully chosen by Rashid al-Din. The book begins with a preface by Rashid al-Din in which he noted that he intended to make Chinese knowledge available to Islamic scholars through translation into Persian.⁴⁰ In addition to medicine, which is the main focus of the book, the preface

³⁶Morgan, 'Rashid al-Din Tabib'. In the endowment deed of the Rab'-i Rashidi, Rashid al-Din refers to other charitable complexes (*abu'ab al-birs*), which he had founded in Sultaniyya, Hamadan, Yazd, and Bastam; see Rashid al-Din, Minuvi, and Afshar, *Waqf Nāma-yi Rab'-i Rashidi*, p. 241.

³⁷S. Blair, 'Ilkhanid Architecture and Society: An Analysis of the Endowment Deed of the Rab'-i Rashidi', *Iran* 22 (1984), pp. 67–90.

³⁸Rashid al-Din, Minuvi, and Afshar, *Waqf Nāma-yi Rab'-i Rashidi*, pp. 237–241. See also W. M. Thackston's translation of parts of this edition of the *waqf nāma* in *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid al-Din's Illustrated History of the World* (London, 1995), pp. 114–115. For further discussion on the manuscripts produced every year in the Rab'-i Rashidi, see N. Ben Azzoune, 'Rashid al-Din Faql Allāh al-Hamadhānī's Manuscript Production Project in Tabriz Reconsidered', in *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th-15th Century Tabriz*, (ed.) J. Pfeiffer (Leiden and Boston, 2014), pp. 187–200.

³⁹For a description of the manuscripts commissioned by the Ilkhans and produced in the workshop of the Rab'-i Rashidi, see Blair, 'Patterns of Patronage', pp. 48–54. Soudavar, 'Han-Lin Academy', pp. 473–475.

⁴⁰P. Berlekamp, 'The Limits of Artistic Exchange in Fourteenth-Century Tabriz: The Paradox of Rashid al-Din's Book on Chinese Medicine, Part I', *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* 27 (2010), pp. 209–260.

indicates Rashid al-Din's knowledge of different areas of the Far Eastern culture such as Chinese script and music.

The Rab'-i Rashidi is regarded as an intellectual foundation from which Rashid al-Din's world views were transmitted to other parts of Iran and the Islamic world. Every year all the compilations of Rashid al-Din⁴¹ were reproduced in both Persian and Arabic languages there and sent to one of the major cities of the Islamic world to be studied at their madrasas. He was directly involved in the process of manuscript production through explaining the specifications for preparing illustrated texts to the artists. The specifications (such as the folios' dimensions or the format of the illustrations) were included in the preface of Rashid al-Din's collected works, the *Majmū'a-yi Rashīdīyya* (*Compendium of Rashid al-Din*), and also in the addendum to the endowment deed of the Rab'-i Rashidi.⁴²

The *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* is considered to be the most ambitious project conducted in the scriptorium of the Rab'-i Rashidi. Ghazan Khan had commissioned Rashid al-Din to write the history of the Mongols. It is generally believed that the Ilkhan ordered the compilation of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* to preserve the Mongols' identity and knowledge of their past. He was afraid that the Mongols' shift towards Islam in Iran would cause them in the future to forget who they were and from where they had come.⁴³ Rashid al-Din fulfils the patron through collecting extensive material on the history and genealogy of the Mongols, most of which had been secret until then. During Öljeytü's time, the work was expanded by the vizier into a historical encyclopaedia on the peoples of the whole of the known world. When Rashid al-Din presented the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* to Öljeytü, the sultan rewarded him with an unprecedented royal favour (*stīyūrghānīshī*).⁴⁴

Locating the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* within a larger historical framework, namely the Mongol domination of Iran, provides insights into Rashid al-Din's conception of the Ilkhans, who were foreign invaders-turned-rulers of Iran, and his approach to their rule. While recounting the events, Rashid al-Din presents the Mongol conquerors from a perspective that suited his own political considerations. Re-examining the vizier's account of Ghazan Khan in the following section, we seek to uncover how Rashid al-Din took advantage of the chronicle in order to empower the central government and stabilise the position of the Mongol Ilkhan as the Muslim *pādshāh* of Iran.

In the third section of Ghazan Khan's history in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, Rashid al-Din describes the character, deeds and words of the Ilkhan and relates his prominent undertakings often entitled as Ghazan Khan's reforms (*Islāhāt-i Ghāzānī*) in modern scholarship. Rashid

⁴¹The collection of all the books and treatises compiled by Rashid al-Din is called *Jāmi' al-Taṣānīf-i Rashīdī* (*Complete Works of Rashid al-Din*).

⁴²Blair and Rashid al-Din, *A Compendium of Chronicles*, p. 90. Rashid al-Din's manuscript production project is further discussed in N. Ben Azzouna and P. Roger-Puyo, 'The Question of the Formation of Manuscript Production Workshops in Iran According to Rashīd al-Dīn Fāḍl Allāh al-Hamadhānī's *Majmū'a Rashīdīyya* in the Bibliothèque nationale de France', *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 7 (2016), pp. 152–194 (see particularly p. 156, n. 9), and N. Ben Azzouna, 'Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh al-Hamadhānī's Manuscript Production Project', pp. 187–200.

⁴³D. Morgan (ed.), *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds* (London, 1982), p. 120.

⁴⁴For a full discussion on the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, see Ch. Melville, 'Jāme' al-Tawārīk', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XIV, 5 (2012), pp. 462–8, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jame-al-tawarik> (accessed 17 February 2020).

A division of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* on the life and reign of Ghazan Khan was published by Karl Jahn in 1940 as an independent volume entitled *Tārīkh-i Mubārak-i Ghāzānī*. The book consists of three main sections. The first part deals with Ghazan's royal lineage. The second part gives an account of his reign. The third part, which is the largest section of the book, addresses Ghazan's orders and operations and praises his moral features.

al-Din compiles forty shorter accounts (*hikāyat*) in this section, which can be loosely placed in three categories. The accounts of the first group describe Ghazan as a faithful Muslim, a knowledgeable, courageous master, and a moral, benevolent ruler who spares no effort to improve the welfare of his people and the prosperity of the state. They are followed by the accounts that expand on the measures taken by the Ilkhan to bring to an end wrong practices, injustice and corruption. The last set of accounts are the new orders issued by Ghazan in order to establish a comprehensive reform across the state. The reform addressed issues as diverse as conducting construction projects in different villages and towns, equipping the arsenal, supervising the royal treasures, standardisation of measurement units, and providing food and drink for the royal camp.⁴⁵

The portrait of Ghazan illustrated by Rashid al-Din in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* appears to be closer to the image of an ideal righteous sultan that the vizier had in mind than the real character of Ghazan. In other words, Rashid al-Din presents his utopia and describes the qualities of his ideal ruler in the book, but by means of referring to the character of the Ilkhan together with his decisions and undertakings in connection with his subjects. Rashid al-Din's picture of Ghazan, as the embodiment of justice and fairness, is indeed an attempt to create a role model for other Ilkhans.⁴⁶

Rashid al-Din frequently refers to the Ilkhan as *Pādshāh-i Islām* (King of Islam).⁴⁷ The Arabic title of 'sultan' is usually added to the name of Ghazan and his successors by their contemporary historians. Rashid al-Din's preference for the word *pādshāh*, a title of Persian origin instead, signifies his intention to establish the Ilkhan's dynastic legitimacy through depicting him as the legitimate inheritor of the Persian Empire.⁴⁸ Furthermore, while in the Iranian elite's opinion Ghazan was a Mongol ruler who had newly converted to Islam, the vizier sanctifies the Ilkhan through titling him the ruler of the kingdom of Islam. Regardless of the flattering side of the epithet, by applying the term widely Rashid al-Din seeks to promote Ghazan's royal and religious charisma that was required to claim full sovereignty over Mongol Iran.⁴⁹

⁴⁵For the third section of the account of Ghazan Khan in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, see Rashid al-Din Fazl Allah Hamadani, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, (eds.) M. Roshan and M. Musavi (Tehran, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 1327–1540.

⁴⁶R. Shabaneh, 'The Political and Social Desires of Rashid al-Din in the *Tārīkh-i Mubārak-i Ghāzānī* [in Persian]', *Kitāb-i Māh-i Tārīkh va Juhrāfiyā* 96 (2005), pp. 20–23.

⁴⁷The epithet of *Pādshāh-i Islām* appears also in the account of Vassaf al-Hazra (d. 1329), a historian of the Ilkhanid court. Interestingly, he uses two different versions of the epithet: *Shāh-zāda-yi Islām* (Prince of Islam) referring to Ghazan before his victory over Baydu (r. March–October 1295), and *Pādshāh-i Islām* (King of Islam) referring to Ghazan following the victory. See Vassaf al-Hazra, *Tahrīr-i Tārīkh-i Vassāf*, (ed.) Abd al-Muhammad Ayati (Tehran, 1967), pp. 192, 197.

⁴⁸Rashid al-Din's agenda to render a legitimate picture of *Ghazan Khan* is also reflected in the coinage minted during the reign of the Ilkhan. For instance, Ghazan's name on the *dirhams* stamped in Tabriz and Nishapur was accompanied by *pādshāh* and *shahanshāh*, the epithets that originated in the royal tradition of ancient Iran. However, the use of Iranian honorific titles on the coins as a means of legitimisation of Mongol rulers was not widely welcomed by all the Ilkhans. Apart from Ghazan, this strategy is evident only in the coins struck under Abaqa Khan and Abu Sai'd (S. Shamsi, M. Shateri, and A. Ahmadi, 'The Study of the Legitimation of the Ilkhans via Ilkhanid Coins, 657–736 AH [in Persian]', *Justār hā-yi Tārīkhī* 9, 2 (2018), pp. 93–121).

⁴⁹Rashid al-Din's approach to the issue of the legitimisation of Ghazan Khan in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* can be discussed in the broader context of the books generally known as *Siyāsatnāma* (Book of Government), the most well-known of which is the *Siyāsatnāma* (or *Siyar al-Mulūk*) compiled by Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092), the Persian vizier of the Turkish Seljuq sultans, Alp Arslan (r. 1063–72) and Malik Shah (r. 1072–1092). The justification of current political state on the one hand and providing ethical advice on government and administration on the other hand are two primary themes pursued in the *Siyāsatnāmas* (M. Ranjbar, 'The Tradition of Writing of *Siyāsatnāma*

To underline the spiritual legitimacy of Ghazan, Rashid al-Din also attributes receiving divine inspiration to the Ilkhan on a number of occasions. For example, when narrating the Mamluk-Ilkhanid war, the vizier refers to the Qur'anic story of Moses and mentions that *Pādshāh-i Islām* heard a voice from *vādī-yi ayman*⁵⁰ that said "Fear not! You have escaped from the wrongdoing people".⁵¹ The voice increased his courage and strengthened him to defeat the Egyptians eventually.⁵²

Alongside Ghazan, Rashid al-Din tries to place an Iranian face on the Mongols in general. For instance, in his account of the confrontation between the Mongol amir Qutlughshah and the Mamluks, he repeatedly calls the Mongol amirs "our valiant men" (*bahādurān-i mā*) and the Mongol military forces "our army" (*lashgarhā-yi mā*).⁵³ The vizier leads the Persian audience to empathise with the Mongols via pretending that the Mongols are "our" warriors rather than outsiders. The consolidation of the Mongols and the Iranians can be considered as a measure taken by the vizier to realise the concept of a centralised and untied form of state.⁵⁴

On the basis of the literary evidence analysed above, one comes to the conclusion that Rashid al-Din's account of Ghazan offers important information on the life and reign of the Ilkhan as narrated through the eyes of a contemporary witness who was at the centre of affairs and experienced events first-hand as a bureaucrat. Nevertheless, the accuracy of his reports could be questioned since he looked at the Ilkhan and evaluated his decisions and actions in the light of his own assumptions and point of view,⁵⁵ to the extent that Morgan remarks that Rashid al-Din's history offers neither a complete real picture of the historical Ghazan nor the full reality of the nature of Mongol rule in Iran.⁵⁶ Similarly, Kamola suggests that the way in which Ghazan is presented in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh* is caused by Rashid al-Din's larger strategy in presenting his historical project that is "to isolate and amplify the importance of individual sources and people".⁵⁷

Liu Bingzhong: a familiar stranger in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh*

Amongst many contributors to the formation of the administrative system of the Mongols in China, we have a better understanding of the career of high-ranking officials who are

in Iran [in Persian], *Tārikh-i Islām dar Āyina-yi Pazhūhish* 9 (2006), pp. 91-124). For further discussion on the *Sīyāsāt-nāma* of Nizam al-Mulk, see, for instance, A. Khal'atbari and N. Dalir, 'The Concept of *Iranzamān* and Khwaja Nizam al-Mulk [in Persian]', *Muṭālī'āt-i Tārikh-i Farhangī* 2 (2009), pp. 27-61. Interestingly, in addition to the common themes of the *Sīyāsāt-nāma* and the *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh*, Hamdallah Mustawfi draws an analogy between Nizam al-Mulk and Rashid al-Din and presents the former as an antetype for the latter (Kamola, *Making Mongol History*, p. 170).

⁵⁰According to the Qur'an, *vādī-yi ayman* is the holy land where God spoke to Moses. *Vādī-yi ayman* is a Persian term coming from the Qur'anic term *al-wād al-ayman* (الواد الايمن) which means the right side of the valley (The Qur'an, 28:30).

⁵¹The Qur'an, 28:25. English translation: <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa> (accessed 4 March 2020).

⁵²Rashid al-Din Fazl Allah Hamadani, *Tārikh-i Mubārak-i Ghāzānī*, (ed.) K. Jahn (London, 1940), p. 127.

⁵³Shabaneh, 'Political and Social Desires', p. 22; Rashid al-Din, *Tārikh-i Mubārak-i Ghāzānī*, p. 148.

⁵⁴I. Petrushevsky, 'Rashīd al-Dīn's Conception of the State', *Central Asiatic Journal* 14, 1/3 (1970), pp. 148-162.

⁵⁵Morgan, 'Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb'.

⁵⁶D. Morgan, 'Rashīd al-dīn and Ġazan Khan', in *L'Iran Face à la Domination Mongole*, (ed.) D. Aigle (Tehran, 1997), pp. 179-188.

⁵⁷Kamola, *Making Mongol History*, p. 81.

brought to our attention by primary sources, while the rest are passing personalities in the historical texts. Our knowledge of the career of such statesmen as Yelü and Liu is primarily based on Chinese sources. Persian and Arabic sources are silent on these figures.⁵⁸ The unremarkable presence of Chinese advisors to the Great Khans in the official histories of the Ilkhanid period casts doubt on the Persians' deep awareness of Chinese institutions, let alone the institutional influence between Yuan China and Ilkhanid Iran. Nevertheless, as the well-known aphorism says, "the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence"; hence, the silence of Persian texts alone does not refute the idea that the words and acts of Chinese bureaucrats somehow reached Ilkhanid Iran.

Rashid al-Din in particular proves to be knowledgeable about East Asia. Judging by his writings such as the missing treatise *On Chinese Government and the Management of the Chinese State*,⁵⁹ he is possibly well-acquainted with the administrative structure of Mongol government in China. Moreover, he is eager to explore Chinese culture and introduce the Iranians to its achievements to the degree that Jahn describes Rashid al-Din's Introduction to the *Tansūkhnāma* "as a kind of defence of the unique character of Chinese culture".⁶⁰ He also shows that his familiarity with the internal affairs of Mongol China goes beyond political matters and state administration. For example, the vizier's awareness of the Mongols' architecture and urban planning is apparent in his detailed description of the construction activities of Qubilai Khan in China.⁶¹ Hence, his silence on some individuals in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* should not count as ignorance.

Rashid al-Din seems reluctant to put too much emphasis on individuals in his account. Key actors are obviously highlighted, but the rest are barely described to the extent that the reader is sometimes left with the doubt that the names are referring to actual figures or fictional characters. For example, in a short section on the Buddhist monks (*bakhshīyān*) who were close confidants of Qubilai and his successor Temür (r. 1294–1307), Rashid al-Din mentions two Tibetan *bakhshīs* named Tanba and Kanba. They resided in the special idol-temples (*but-khānas*) of the Khaqan, which were called *nangiyyās*. While both figures are high-ranking monks, Rashid al-Din confines his description to the peculiar appearance of Tanba and writes that his front teeth were too long so that his lips did not meet!⁶²

The same is true for some individuals via whom Rashid al-Din gathered his information to compose various cultural histories. Although he names the informants, it is not always possible to identify them or trace them in non-Persian sources. For example, in the preface of the *History of China*, Rashid al-Din names two Chinese scholars (*hukamā-yi Khitāy*), Litaji and Kamsun, who were well-versed in medicine, astronomy and Chinese history.⁶³ He praises them for their extensive knowledge, but does not expand on their career. In the same way, in the *History of India*, Rashid al-Din mentions a Kashmiri Buddhist monk called

⁵⁸Rachewiltz, 'Sino-Mongol Culture Contacts', p. 7.

⁵⁹According to Rashid al-Din's description of the *Jāmi' al-Taṣānīf-i Rashīdī* (*Complete Works of Rashid al-Din*), this work included fourteen titles four of which were translations from Chinese. They were titled *Scientific and Folk Medicine of the Chinese*; *Simple Chinese Medicines*; *Simple Mongol Medicines*; *On Chinese Government and the Management of the Chinese State* (Kamola, *Making Mongol History*, pp. 113–114).

⁶⁰K. Jahn, 'Rashīd al-Dīn and Chinese Culture', *Central Asiatic Journal* 14, 1/3 (1970), pp. 134–147.

⁶¹Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 900–904.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 930.

⁶³Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh: Tārīkh-i Aqwām-i Pādshāhān-i Khitāy*, (ed.) M. Roshan (Tehran, 2006), p. 8.

Kamalashri Bakhshī as one of his informants and expresses how well-informed was he about the book of Shakamuni and his teachings, but does not go beyond this.⁶⁴

The absence of Liu Bingzhong in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, particularly a section of the story of Qubilai Khan in which Rashid al-Din enumerates the amirs, viziers and officers at the Khaqan's court, *Hikāyat-i umarā va vuzarā va biyūkhchīyān-i vilāyat-i Khitāy* (*Account of the Amirs, Viziers, and Officers of the State of Cathay*),⁶⁵ is noticeable. Although Rashid al-Din never mentions Liu's name, he seems aware of the actions of the Chinese advisor. On some occasions, he includes those historical events in which Liu was directly involved according to other contemporary Chinese sources. The account of Qubilai Khan's construction activities in the city of Kaiping Fu is an intriguing example in this regard and merits further attention.

Rashid al-Din writes that the Khaqan desired to build an edifice (*sarāy*) in the summer quarter (*yaylāq*) of the city of Keimin Fu (i.e. Kaiping Fu which was later called Shangdu). In the east of the city, he had founded a palatial hall (*qarshī*),⁶⁶ in the past called Lang-ten, but abandoned it following an ominous dream. He consulted his counsellors and engineers to find a suitable location for a new *qarshī*. They all agreed on a lake (*nā'ur*)⁶⁷ located in the midst of a meadow in the vicinity of the city of Keimin Fu. Rashid al-Din describes in great detail how they drained the lake to prepare the land for construction. Afterwards a platform (*ṣuffā*) was built upon which a Chinese-style (*yang-i Khitāy*) *qarshī* was erected.⁶⁸ This passage of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* seems to narrate the construction of this particular palatial hall,⁶⁹ rather than the foundation of the city of Kaiping Fu itself.

The building of Kaiping Fu (Shangdu) is associated with a late-Yuan legend, according to which a dragon resided in a lake located in the centre of this site. Liu, who was responsible for selecting the site of the city and drafting the city scheme, suppressed the dragon by placing a magic spell and invoking divine powers. The dragon was then evicted from the lake and the lake was drained.⁷⁰ Given the fact that contemporary Chinese accounts and recent archaeological reports confirm some of the construction complexities described by Rashid al-Din,⁷¹ this legend was possibly nourished, on the one hand, by the amount of actual labour put into the project to prepare the land and build the structures, and the extraordinary skills of Liu in geomancy and urban planning on the other hand.

Although this legend was in circulation in late-Yuan times, i.e. years after Rashid al-Din recounted the foundation of Kaiping Fu, we should take into account two points: first, the legend is regarded as a mixture of historical realities and mythical actions, and second, Chinese literary works clearly confirm Liu's involvement in the construction of Kaiping

⁶⁴Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh: Tārīkh-i Hind va Sind va Kashmir*, (ed.) M. Roshan (Tehran, 2005), p. 2.

⁶⁵Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 863-931.

⁶⁶*Qarshī* is a generic name for such imperial buildings. It means palace and palatial hall in Mongolian (Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 2385).

⁶⁷*Nā'ur* in Mongolian means sea or lake (*Ibid.*, p. 2414).

⁶⁸Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 903-904.

⁶⁹Chan suggests that Rashid al-Din in fact refers to the main structural compound of Shangdu, which is known as Da'an Ge (Great Peace Pavilion), the Mongol ruler's audience hall. See H. Chan, 'Exorcising the Dragon: A Legend about the Building of the Mongolian Upper Capital (Shangdu)', *Central Asiatic Journal* 55, 1 (2011), pp. 1-32. See particularly pp. 12-13.

⁷⁰On Shangdu's dragon legend, see *Ibid.*

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 30.

Fu. Therefore, one can suppose that Liu really did play a role in draining the lake and preparing the land for construction. All the evidence raises the possibility that Rashid al-Din, who expands on the drainage operation, must have heard of Liu, but for some reason chose to remain silent on the operators.⁷²

The absence of Chinese high-ranking advisors such as Yelü and Liu in the works of Rashid al-Din, as opposed to his references to the famed Muslim officers of the Great Khans such as Mahmud Yalavach and Ahmad Fanakati (d. 1282),⁷³ raises the question of whether Rashid al-Din, as the vizier of Muslim Ghazan, seeks not to highlight the role of Chinese literati in the Mongols' bureaucratic system in China, but rather turns the spotlight on Central Asian Muslims of whom he occasionally shows his advocacy. In the case of the financial officer of Qubilai, Ahmad Fanakati, for example, while Chinese-language sources contain harsh criticism of his performance in office,⁷⁴ Rashid al-Din believes that Chinese amirs (*umarā-yi Khitāy*) showed hostility towards Ahmad due to jealousy.⁷⁵

Alternatively, Rashid al-Din's silence on well-known Chinese advisors of the Great Khans could be simply due to the fact that they were gradually replaced by the Central Asians. For instance, when Rashid al-Din describes the political hierarchy in the court of Qubilai, he enumerates different positions. He mentions the title of *finjān*⁷⁶ as the third rank in this arrangement, which was the title of the deputy of great amirs who were called *chīngsāng*.⁷⁷ He writes that (in the past, the position of *finjān* was given to the Chinese (*ahl-i Khitāy*), but now (in the time of Qubilai) it is also given to the Mongols, Tajiks and Uyghurs.⁷⁸

Bolad Aqa and his association with the Ilkhanid court⁷⁹

The Mongol rulers of Iran took the title of Ilkhan to show their subordination to the Great Khans of the Mongol Empire. Most of the Ilkhans ascended the throne only after the official envoys arrived in their courts and delivered the decrees (*farmān* or *yarlīgh*) from the Khaqans.

⁷²Rashid al-Din also gives a detailed description of the construction of the city of Daidu (Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 901–903). According to Chinese sources, Liu was connected with the choice of location as well as the design of the city. Daidu was planned on the basis of the model of the ideal capital described in the classical Confucian text of the *Zhou Li*, the *Rituals of the Zhou dynasty*. See Tomoko Masuya, 'The Ilkhanid Phase of Takht-i Sulaimān' (unpublished PhD dissertation, New York University, 1997), p. 214; N. Steinhardt, 'The Plan of Khubilai Khan's Imperial City', *Artibus Asiae* 44, 2/3 (1983), pp. 137–158. The *Rituals of Zhou (Zhou Li)* became one of the nine Confucian Classics during the Tang dynasty (618–907). The text had been written in early classical Chinese. The *Rituals* is an idealised blueprint for government organisation; see B. Elman and M. Kern, *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), pp. 1–29.

⁷³Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongolian Empire*, p. 4.

⁷⁴Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 36.

⁷⁵Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 915.

⁷⁶The word *finjān* is derived from the Chinese word *pingzhang* (*ping zhang* or *ping chang*); see Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 2377.

⁷⁷*Chengxiang* (or *chīngsāng* as it appears in Persian sources) was transmitted from Chinese to Mongolian and from Mongolian to Persian. It means chancellor or prime vizier in Chinese and vizier of state in Mongolian (Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 2357).

⁷⁸Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 906–907.

⁷⁹Bolad or Bulad is the same *pūlād* or *fūlād* which means steel in Persian. Apparently the word is of Turkish origin that later passed into Mongolian language. The Mongols and Turks believed that if they called their children with the names of tough objects, they would be strong; see Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 2042.

For instance, in the case of Abaqa Khan, Rashid al-Din says that following the death of Hülegü in 1265, Mongol Khatuns, princes, and amirs gathered and asked the Ilkhan to come to the throne. He reluctantly agreed while he believed that “my master (*āqā*) is Qubilai Khan. How can I ascend the throne without his order (*farmān*)?”⁸⁰ Five years later, when the envoys of Qubilai Khan brought a decree, crown and robe of honour, Abaqa was enthroned again.⁸¹ The last four Ilkhans who seized power after the death of Qubilai—Baydu (r. 1295), Ghazan, Öljeytü and Abu Sa‘id—did not wait for the decree of investiture from the Great Khans and declared their sovereignty immediately after the demise of their predecessor.⁸²

In addition to dispatching decrees in the name of the Ilkhans as a sign of approval, Qubilai interfered directly in the internal affairs of the Ilkhanate through sending his embassies to Iran. Qubilai’s ambassador, Bolad *Noyan*,⁸³ or Pulad Aqa as he appears in Persian sources, was a senior court official who arrived in Iran in 1285 during the reign of Arghun. The Ilkhan had risen to power following the execution of his rival Ahmad Tegüder (r. 1282–4), but like his father Abaqa, waited two years to receive the decree from the Great Khan. The Khaqan’s envoy, Urduqiya, arrived from China and brought his *yarligh* in early 1286. After Arghun’s second enthronement (as Rashid al-Din emphasises),⁸⁴ Bolad, who ensured that Arghun was enthroned officially, considered his mission in Iran accomplished and intended to return home. His trip to China, however, was unsuccessful and he was forced to return to Iran. Bolad stayed in the territory of the Ilkhans for more than 28 years,⁸⁵ and married a former concubine of the deceased Ilkhan Abaqa, although he had children in the service of Qubilai in China, according to Rashid al-Din.⁸⁶

Bolad, a member of a Mongolian-speaking tribe called Dörben, was one of the most trusted confidants of Qubilai as well as his *bā’urchī* (steward).⁸⁷ As stated in the *Yuan Shi* (the official dynastic history of the Yuan dynasty), Bolad held different administrative and military positions while actively participating in the establishment of a number of imperial offices in China. His direct involvement in the administration of the court and the government brought him a deep knowledge of the Chinese and Mongolian socio-political system governing the state.⁸⁸

The first phase of Bolad’s career as a high-ranking official in the government, the military and the imperial household of the Yuan dynasty was followed by his mission as an ambassador in Iran. Bolad’s rich experience of working in different imperial offices in the Yuan domain is likely to have influenced his success as a notable advisor in the Ilkhanid court.

⁸⁰Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 1059–1060.

⁸¹According to Marco Polo even the selection of the Ilkhans’ wives happened under the supervision of the Khaqans; see Masuya, ‘Ilkhanid Phase of Takht-i Sulaimān’, p. 91. For further discussion on the broader issue of the relationship between the Khaqans in China and the Ilkhans, see *Ibid.*, pp. 8–40.

⁸²Bolod Cheng-Hsiang [in Persian], *Encyclopædia of the World of Islam*, <http://lib.eshia.ir/23019/1/1692> (accessed 12 December 2019).

⁸³Noyan was a title used for Mongol amirs.

⁸⁴Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, p. 1161.

⁸⁵Allsen, ‘Two Cultural Brokers’, pp. 66–67.

⁸⁶Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 197.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸Allsen, ‘Biography of a Cultural Broker’, p. 8. For further discussion on Bolad’s appointments in Yuan China, see P. Berlekamp, V. Lo, and W. Yidan ‘Administering Art, History, and Science in the Mongol Empire: Rashid al-Din and Bolad Chengxiang’, Seminar presented at [China Centre for Health and Humanity](http://china-centre-for-health-and-humanity.ucl.ac.uk/), UCL, 19 January 2015, pp. 56–60.

He was designated by Arghun as his chief advisor and played an active role in the governance of the realm. In the reign of Arghun's successor, Gaykhatu (r. 1291–5), he remained in the court and provided the Ilkhan with advice particularly on financial issues.⁸⁹ Bolad lost part of his influence over the court during the reign of Ghazan. However, he kept his good relationship with the Ilkhan and retained his position as an important official and trustworthy consultant. This phase of Bolad's life is significant within the scope of this article, as it was then that he started his partnership with Rashid al-Din in documenting the history of the Mongols in the grand project of the vizier, the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*. Under Öljeytü, Bolad regained his active role in political affairs. Abu al-Qasim Kashani (d. 1337), the historian of the Ilkhanid court, mentions the name of Pulad Chīngsāng (Bolad) in the third place after Mongol generals, Qutlughshah and Chupan, when he enumerates the senior officials of Öljeytü. The other interesting example of the esteem in which Bolad was held, and also of the amity between Bolad and Rashid al-Din, can be seen in Kashani's account of Öljeytü's marriage with Qutlughshah Khatun. In the ceremony, Bolad was the representative (*vakīl*) of the groom and Rashid al-Din was the representative of the bride.⁹⁰ In the accounts of the reign of Öljeytü, Bolad's name appears on different occasions not only as a wise consultant, but also as an influential amir who still received military commands from the Ilkhan. He eventually died in the meadow of Arran, in the northwest of Iran, in 1313 when he was at the winter camp of Öljeytü.⁹¹

Bolad was an acknowledged expert on Mongol tradition. According to Rashid al-Din, he was the vizier's primary informant who provided much of the information on the cultural life and tribal history of the Mongols: in his view, Bolad was the only person who was as knowledgeable as Ghazan about the Mongols' genealogy.⁹² However, Rashid al-Din's acknowledgement of Bolad's part in the process of writing his history book is sometimes attributed to the fact that the vizier concealed a larger reality in favour of increasing the importance of individual people such as Bolad or Ghazan. Kamola argues that the Mongol historical tradition was more diverse than the memory of one man.⁹³ Bolad's involvement in the writing of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, nevertheless, is still suggested specially in the first part of the chronicle that is on the history of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples.⁹⁴

Alongside historiography, Bolad as a 'cultural broker' paved the way for the transportation of many items of Chinese culture, science and technology to Iran. For example, as a pillar of Ghazan's reforms, Rashid al-Din sought to restore the economy, as part of which the revitalisation of agriculture was crucial. The production of handbooks on agricultural topics was a method of dissemination of agricultural knowledge. The treatise of the *Āṣār va Aḥyā'* (*Monuments and Animals*) attributed to Rashid al-Din is a manual on the plants and products of Hindustan and South China which reveals substantial borrowing from East Asian agriculture.⁹⁵ Taking into account Bolad's appointment as director of the Office of the Grand

⁸⁹ According to al-'Umari cited in Allsen, 'Two Cultural Brokers', p. 67.

⁹⁰ Abu al-Ghasim Kashani, *Tārīkh-i Öljeytü*, (ed.) M. Hambly (Tehran, 1969), p. 42.

⁹¹ Kashani, *Tārīkh-i Öljeytü*, p. 147.

⁹² Rashid al-Din, *Tārīkh-i Mubārak-i Ghāzānī*, p. 171.

⁹³ Kamola, *Making Mongol History*, p. 81.

⁹⁴ Melville, 'Jāme' al-Tawārīk'.

⁹⁵ Allsen, 'Biography of a Cultural Broker', pp. 14–15.

Supervisors of Agriculture by the imperial order of Qubilai Khan,⁹⁶ one could suggest that Bolad must have had a pivotal role in the transmission of information on Chinese agriculture to Iran.

The introduction of *chāv* (a type of paper currency) and possibly block-printing technology in Ilkhanid Iran is also ascribed to Bolad. *Chāv* was issued during the reign of Gaykhatu around 1294 but did not last long as it proved an economic disaster that caused an uproar and confusion. *Chāv* was modelled on a Chinese paper money called *ch'ao*. The notes bore both a Chinese inscription and the *shahādā*.⁹⁷ In the preface of the *Tansūkhnāma*, Rashid al-Din mentions the issue of this paper currency in China and remarks that “its usefulness is beyond words to describe ... It is deemed impossible to bring *ch'ao* in circulation in our country”.⁹⁸

Large numbers of nomadic and sedentary populations including artists, artisans, architects, scholars, travellers, merchants and embassies, who moved across different cultural zones of Eurasia, played a substantial role in the widespread circulation of information throughout the territory of the Mongols. Rashid al-Din names some individuals as informants who assisted him to compose various cultural histories. However, judging by his writings, he must have been in contact with many more people of different ethnic groups who are barely highlighted in the text. For example, in the Introduction to the *History of India, Sind, and Kashmir*, Rashid al-Din clearly states that no one was well-informed about the history of the lands of India (*mamālik-i Hindūstān*) as it deserved to be known and therefore he gained part of his information through what he had heard from passers-by, messengers, pilgrims and travellers.⁹⁹

Bolad is often highlighted as Rashid al-Din's primary informant—mainly by the vizier himself—who unravelled or revealed the unknown world of the Mongols. His lengthy career in Iran in close collaboration with Rashid al-Din explains to some degree the breadth and accuracy of the information on the eastern sectors of the Mongol Empire presented in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*. Although this article places emphasis on the role of Bolad as an informant, by no means does it intend to present him as the sole intermediary through whom the transmission of Chinese intellectual notions to the Ilkhanid court and Rashid al-Din in particular took place. However, within the scope of the present research, Bolad is worthy of special attention. Even if the available textual evidence hardly substantiates his close association with Liu,¹⁰⁰ during the long years of service in the court of the Mongols in China, he was directly involved in the political and administrative system whose skeleton had been shaped several years earlier by Chinese scholars and advisors including Liu. Given his background, Bolad's active presence in the Ilkhanid court and his amity with Persian elite

⁹⁶Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, p. 67.

⁹⁷P. Jackson, 'Čāv', *Encyclopædia Iranica* V, 1 (1990), pp. 96–97, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cav-cao-from-chinese-cao-paper-money-assignat-mathews-chinese-english-dictionary-no> (accessed 29 October 2020).

⁹⁸Jahn, 'Rashīd al-Dīn and Chinese Culture', p. 146.

⁹⁹Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh: Tārīkh-i Hind va Sind va Kashmir*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰Allsen suggests that Bolad was a close associate of Liu Bingzhong during the early stage of his career in China. He apparently cooperated with Liu in establishing the Imperial Archive or the Imperial Library Directorate (*Mi-shu ch'ien*) of China in 1273, controlling the production and preservation of government documents (Allsen, *Culture and Conquest*, pp. 68, 95). Given the fact that the cooperation between Bolad and Liu happened after Liu's retirement when he was no longer the councillor of the Secretariat, the idea of close association between the two figures needs to be supported by further evidence.

could be testimony to Rashid al-Din's exposure to the Chinese political philosophy that had determined the approach of the Chinese nobles to the Mongols following the conquest of China. In this regard, Bolad would be a more noticeable figure in comparison with numerous individuals already known to us, who in some fashion contributed to the westward transmission of knowledge in the Mongol Empire.

Sage rulers and virtuous ministers

This article has sought to show that Rashid al-Din and Liu Bingzhong, despite their different official positions and political missions in the Mongol courts, adopted similar approaches to the governance of the realm in the post-conquest era as they had confronted similar situations. They provided a proper context for the legitimate presence of the Mongols in Iran and China. By moulding the conquerors into familiar sultans and emperors, they legitimised them and justified their presence as the foreign rulers of newly conquered lands. Thus, both reconciled the invaders with their native subjects and helped engender a greater tolerance towards them. Despite the similarity, the two characters seemed to tailor their plans according to local circumstances so as to meet different requirements in the two states. Nevertheless, the common themes in their policies towards foreigners are sufficient to raise the possibility that the way that the Chinese nobles—Liu in particular—dealt with the Mongol conquest and subsequent confusion established a model that was imitated by Rashid al-Din several decades later when he was struggling to end the chaos and set up a centralised form of government in Ilkhanid Iran.

Rashid al-Din wrote the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* 80 years after Genghis Khan's invasion of Iran and 50 years after the foundation of the Ilkhanate. At the time, the Ilkhans had established themselves as rulers of Iran and the memories of the Mongols' initial destruction and terror, to some extent, had faded away. Rashid al-Din, in fact, took advantage of this time lapse and attempted to represent Ghazan Khan as a faithful convert and a wise Muslim sultan in the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, rather than as a Mongol Ilkhan or an outsider. Rashid al-Din's description of Ghazan's ethical characteristics as a righteous ruler can be interpreted as the vizier's recommendations for any future Mongol ruler who would govern the state, whether or not the Ilkhan's described features were based on reality.

Rashid al-Din's counterpart in China, Liu, had previously tried to rearrange the Mongol administrative system on the basis of the traditional Chinese model. His memorandum to Qubilai Khan was part of his policy to reinforce this model as opposed to the system brought in by the Mongol conquerors. Comparable to Rashid al-Din's account of Ghazan Khan's reform, Liu's scheme addresses two primary issues: the restoration of the former system, which in this case is the traditional Chinese structure, and the formulation of a new code of law in order to settle the political and cultural turbulence that had spread across the state following the conquest.¹⁰¹ Liu involved a higher number of Chinese literati in the political system and acted as mediator between the Mongol ruling class and the Chinese elite. He greatly benefitted from the experience and knowledge of Chinese bureaucrats and Confucian scholars.

¹⁰¹For Liu's scheme, see Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung: A Buddhist-Taoist Statesman', pp. 119–122.

Although Liu adhered to Buddhist and Taoist orders particularly in his private life, he showed a strong inclination to Confucianism and the implementation of its practices and teachings in his career. Making a deep understanding between the ruler and his ministers is a main theme in the Confucian political philosophy. While the ruler was dependent on his wise consultants for their advice, reciprocally his advisors deserved to serve a virtuous ruler since moral qualities as well as abilities in practical matters were considered vital to the success of administrative system of the state. Chan describes this relationship as the dual concept of “sage ruler” and “virtuous minister”.¹⁰² Liu might not have been exactly the model imperial advisor described in the texts for historical figures are idealised there and become less similar to their reality in Chinese official historiography. Nevertheless, his prominent presence in the administration system of Qubilai and his involvement in most of the plans and projects implemented by the Khaqan suggest that Liu must have fitted the role of “virtuous minister” perfectly while he attempted to fit Qubilai into the mould of “sage ruler” through placing the Khaqan as a legitimate emperor in the traditional Chinese political system.

One may wonder whether the same Confucian rapport attributed to Liu and his master Qubilai Khan developed between Rashid al-Din and Ghazan. The picture of Ghazan depicted as the wise Muslim in the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh* resembles the portrait of Qubilai who was rendered as the “sage ruler” in the Confucian tradition. In the same way, Rashid al-Din’s role in the legitimisation of the Ilkhan is comparable to Liu’s effort to cast Qubilai in the mould of the legitimate emperor of China. While there is no reference to the Confucian duality of “sage ruler” and “virtuous minister” in the *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh* or any other official history of the Ilkhanid period, it is noteworthy that the duality had some counterparts in Persian literature. In the *Zafarnāma (Book of Victory)* Hamdallah Mustawfī (d. 1349), historian and geographer of the Ilkhanid period, associates Rashid al-Din with the Sassanian vizier Buzurgmihr. Kamola points out that in the earliest manuscript of the work copied in Shiraz in 1405, the pages whose margins are filled with Buzurgmihr’s “discourse on wisdom” are followed by Rashid al-Din’s “discourse on wisdom” in the main text block of the manuscript. Mustawfi praises the wisdom of the two viziers in more than 60 pages of this manuscript and presents them as qualified statesmen. The analogy goes beyond the viziers and applies to their masters, Ghazan Khan and Khusraw Anushirvan, as Mustawfi highlights their similarities in the *Zafarnāma*.¹⁰³ Interestingly, Rashid al-Din draws the same analogy between himself and Buzurgmihr in the *Kitāb al-Sulṭānīyya*, although he replaces Ghazan Khan with his second patron, Öljeytü.¹⁰⁴

In view of the available textual sources on the career of Rashid al-Din and the group of Chinese advisors serving the Great Khans of the Mongol Empire, it will be challenging to prove beyond doubt that the former closely imitated the policies pursued by the latter. Nonetheless, given the evidence offered in this article, the issue of adopting common strategies should not be simply dismissed. Rather delving more deeply into this area in future studies will cast light on the poorly-understood subject of the westward transmission of

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

¹⁰³ Kamola, *Making Mongol History*, pp. 168–169.

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Brack, ‘Mediating Sacred Kingship: Conversion and Sovereignty in Mongol Iran’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016), p. 274.

intellectual and institutional notions under the Mongols, and how the bulk of these ideas were absorbed by the Iranians and reflected in their policies towards the Mongols.

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that this article has not been immune to a common flaw affecting studies focusing upon transcultural exchanges. The unequal proficiency in the languages spoken by different ethnic groups who were involved in the process of transmission of ideas across Eurasia has caused the unbalanced treatment of Persian, Chinese and Mongolian primary sources in this article. In the case of Persian sources, the historical accounts in their original language are consulted, while in the cases of Central Asian and Chinese sources, the exploration here relies mainly on the translation of the original texts as well as secondary sources. This limitation, however, should not act as a deterrent to other scholars. The evidence that has come to light in this article on the basis of Persian primary sources lays the foundations for future studies that enjoy wider accessibility to Chinese and Mongolian primary sources.¹⁰⁵

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